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Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space
Scientific and Technical Subcommittee
Fifty-fifth session
Vienna, 29 January–9 February 2018

Draft report of the Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space

1. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 72/77, the Subcommittee, at its 875th meeting, on 29 January, reconvened its Working Group on the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space, with Sam A. Harbison (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland) as Chair.

2. The Working Group recalled the following objectives of its multi-year workplan for the period 2017–2021, adopted by the Subcommittee at its fifty-fourth session, in 2017 (see A/AC.105/1138, annex II, paras. 8 and 9):

Objective 1. Promote and facilitate the implementation of the Safety Framework for Nuclear Power Source Applications in Outer Space by:

(a) Providing an opportunity for member States and international intergovernmental organizations considering or initiating involvement in space NPS applications to summarize and discuss their plans, progress to date and any challenges faced or foreseen in implementing the Safety Framework;

(b) Providing an opportunity for member States and international intergovernmental organizations with experience in space NPS applications to make presentations on challenges identified under subparagraph (a) above, and on their mission-specific experiences in implementing the guidance contained in the Safety Framework.

Objective 2. Discuss within the Working Group advances in knowledge and practices and their potential for enhancing the technical content and scope of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space through presentations from member States and international intergovernmental organizations based on one or more of the following:

(a) Their practical experience in implementing the Principles;

(b) Their knowledge of advances in science and technology relating to space NPS;

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(c) Their knowledge of internationally accepted norms, standards and practices regarding radiation protection and nuclear safety.

3. In accordance with objective 1 of its multi-year workplan, the Working Group received information from member States and an international intergovernmental organization on their progress in implementing the Safety Framework. The Working Group also reviewed the status of technical presentations pursuant to the invitation extended in 2017 and noted that a number of member States and an international intergovernmental organization intended to deliver technical presentations at the sessions of the Subcommittee to be held in 2019 and 2020.

4. The Working Group noted with satisfaction that a number of States and an international intergovernmental organization had implemented, or were in the process of implementing, the Safety Framework, and had reported that it provided a valuable foundation for developing their respective safety frameworks for the use of space NPS.

5. The Working Group took note of the technical presentation entitled "Preliminary safety research on space nuclear power sources" that had been delivered during the fifty-fifth session of the Subcommittee by the representative of China.

6. In relation to objective 2 of its multi-year workplan, the Working Group recalled a conference room paper submitted by France at the fifty-third session of the Subcommittee, in 2016, entitled "Proposal to revise the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 47/68 of 14 December 1992" (A/AC.105/C.1/2016/CRP.7).

7. In accordance with that objective, the Working Group discussed advances in knowledge and practices and their potential for enhancing the technical content and scope of the Principles Relevant to the Use of Nuclear Power Sources in Outer Space. The Working Group exchanged views on practical experiences in implementing the Principles in relation to enhancing the safety of space NPS applications. From that preliminary discussion, the Working Group identified a number of aspects of the Principles that appeared worthy of further discussion. They included the structure and scope of the Principles, the treatment of space NPS safety in principles 3 and 4 and the general treatment of radiation protection and safety standards in the Principles.

8. The Working Group agreed to continue the exchange of views on the Principles in the course of its intersessional work and emphasized the importance of relevant presentations from member States and international intergovernmental organizations, as foreseen in subparagraphs (a), (b) and (c) of objective 2.

9. The Working Group agreed that intersessional work would be required in order to successfully meet the objectives of its multi-year workplan and decided to conduct its intersessional work in 2018 by holding teleconferences, the first of which would be held on 14 June 2018.

10. In accordance with its multi-year workplan, the Working Group requested the Secretariat to invite, by no later than April 2018, States members of the Committee and international intergovernmental organizations to make technical presentations pursuant to objective 1 and/or objective 2 of the workplan. The Working Group also requested the Secretariat to allocate sufficient time for the work of the Working Group during the fifty-sixth session of the Subcommittee, in 2019, in order to ensure the effective delivery of technical presentations, to be followed by an exchange of views and discussions.

11. At its [...] meeting, on [...] February, the Working Group adopted the present report.